



U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 12 Sep – 18 Sep 2011



### Countdown to 7 December 1941.

On 10 September 1941, General Short, Commander of the Army's Hawaiian Department, **requested the construction of bomb-proof aircraft repair facilities**. He thought this was "vital to the continued functioning of the Hawaiian Air Force during an attack on Oahu." On 16 September, Admiral Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations, sent a letter to the chief of ordnance asking for research into a lighter, more easily deployed anti-torpedo net to protect U.S. Navy vessels against torpedo bombers. Neither of these proposed systems were in place prior to the Japanese attack on 7 December.

16 September 1941 **The Hawaiian Operation was rehearsed** for one day of the Japanese Navy's annual table-top wargames. The exercise was critiqued the following morning. Commander Minoru Genda, Air Staff Officer of the First Air Fleet and the primary planner for the air attack on Oahu, later said "The war games cut through the year 1941 like the sharp edge of a dividing line. They clarified our problem and gave us a new sense of direction and purpose. After they were over, all elements of the Japanese Navy went to work as never before, because time was running out."

17 September 1908 **Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge** of the Army became the first person and the **first U.S. military member to die in an airplane accident** when he crashed with pilot Orville Wright during a flight test at Fort Myer, Virginia. A propeller split and broke a wire supporting the rudder, sending the aircraft into the ground from about 75 feet of altitude. Selfridge was pinned under the engine and died later that afternoon. Wright also received serious injuries.



12-15 September 1918 Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell commanded Allied air forces during the **first major American offensive of World War I at Saint-Mihiel, France**. These air forces supported a plan by General Pershing to remove a dent in Allied lines (see map below), capture fortresses to the east, and then invade Germany.



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Pershing knew control of the air was necessary, and he gave the job to an airman, Brig. Gen. Billy Mitchell, rather than more senior Army commanders with no aviation experience. Mitchell planned an air campaign that set many precedents for air doctrine and operations. He commanded 1,481 aircraft—at the time the largest air force ever assembled for a single battle. This force included 366 observation airplanes, 323 day bombers, 91 night bombers, and 701 pursuit aircraft. (See photo of bombers below.)

At this time in the history of air warfare, aerial observation and artillery spotting were the first priorities of air units because those missions were crucial for army operations (and aircraft were not sufficiently developed to be decisive as an independent force). So aircraft photographed the front daily to check artillery locations, trench conditions, and other indicators. Long-range sorties were flown deep behind enemy lines to photograph and observe road and rail traffic, check the activity at ammunition dumps, and establish targets for both day and night bombardment. Guiding and observing the effects of artillery fire was hazardous duty for the aircrews because enemy pursuit aircraft could respond and attack. There was also the unseen but ever-present danger of being hit by an artillery shell in flight. Protecting the observation aircraft was also important and took precedence over bombing and strafing.



Despite poor weather, Mitchell's air forces made a critical contribution to the successful attack on the Saint-Mihiel salient. Pershing's First Army captured 15,000 enemy troops and more than 250 heavy guns at the cost of 7,000 casualties, and they liberated 200 square miles of French territory. The U.S. attack only faltered when the infantry outran their slow-moving artillery support and food supplies on the muddy roads eastward.

Mitchell's plans were very detailed. To keep battle preparations secret, the initial air mission was to deny enemy reconnaissance of areas behind the lines at St. Mihiel while airfields and depots were prepared. An extensive radio warning network was set up to report on all air activity. An early form of combat air patrol kept pursuit aircraft airborne over Allied airbases to intercept enemy observation aircraft.

15 September 1938 **Hickam Field was officially activated.** It was the principal army airfield in Hawaii and the only one large enough to accommodate the B-17 bomber.



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17 September 1941 During the “Louisiana maneuvers,” the **Army dropped paratroopers for the first time** in a tactical exercise. Thirteen DC-3s dropped a parachute company.

15 September 1942 Fifth Air Force airlifted the **first U.S. troops to New Guinea**, transporting men of the 126th Infantry Regiment from Australia to Seven-Mile Airdrome near Port Moresby.

13 September 1943 The 52nd Troop Carrier Wing used more than 80 transport aircraft to drop some **1,200 paratroopers on the Salerno beachhead** in Italy. Not a single man or airplane was lost in one of the most successful Allied airborne operations of the war.



15 September 1944 **Operation INTERLUDE.** Allied forces invaded Morotai in the Dutch East Indies – an island within fighter range of the southern Philippines. **FEAF units supported the operation with attacks against Japanese bases on nearby islands.** The landings on Morotai were unopposed and construction of two airdromes began at once. The photo at left from the [80th Fighter Squadron](#) website and shows the “Headhunters” on Morotai in November, 1944.

17 September 1944 **Operation MARKET GARDEN** began when 1,546 Allied aircraft and 478 gliders carried 35,000 troops for an airborne assault between Eindhoven and Arnhem in the Netherlands. However, Allied armies failed in their attempt to secure bridges and cross the Rhine River into Germany. This operation was the subject of the 1977 movie *A Bridge Too Far*.

18 September 1947 **The U.S. Air Force was founded as an independent service** – equal in status with the Army and Navy. World War II had proven the value of airpower, and the 1947 National Security Act established this independent air arm of the Department of Defense.

W. Stuart Symington took his oath as the **first Secretary of the Air Force**.

18 September 1948 Convair pilot Sam Shannon made the first flight in an experimental XF-92A, the **first true delta-wing aircraft** (right). Born out of a USAAF proposal for a supersonic interceptor, the AF-92 was made possible by advances in jet engines. The design came from German aeronautical engineer Alexander Lippisch, who had been brought to the U.S. under Operation Paperclip. The XF-92 design led to the F-102 and F-106 fighters and the B-58 bomber.



15 September 1950 U.S. ground forces supported by U.S. Navy and Marine Corps air strikes invaded **Inchon** near Seoul, Korea, far to the rear of enemy lines. The invasion, coupled with a USAF-supported Eighth Army advance from the Pusan perimeter that began the next day, turned



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the tide of the Korean War, eventually forcing the North Korean army to withdraw from South Korea. On 18 September, 42 B-29s dropped 1,600 bombs on enemy troop concentrations near Waegwan, allowing Eighth Army to advance rapidly from the Pusan perimeter toward Seoul.

14 September 1951 Capt. John S. Walmsley, Jr., USAF (right) earned the **Medal of Honor** when he was shot down and killed on a night interdiction mission in Korea. Flying a searchlight-equipped B-26 Invader, Capt Walmsley stopped an enemy supply train with bombs and then made repeated passes to illuminate it for other bombers. He flew through intense enemy fire to ensure target destruction. More on Capt. Walmsley [here](#).



13 September 1985 In history's only successful satellite kill by an aircraft-launched missile, an ASM-135 anti-satellite (ASAT) weapon launched from an F-15 successfully destroyed an orbiting satellite moving at 17,500 miles per hour approximately 290 miles above the Earth. Major Wilbert D. "Doug" Pearson, Jr., zoom-climbed his F-15 to 80,000 feet and then launched the ASAT. Both the first and second stages fired successfully, and the miniature kinetic kill vehicle separated, homed in on the satellite, and destroyed it upon impact. At left, an ASAT launch from an F-15.

16 September 1985 **Hickam AFB was designated a National Historic Landmark** as one of the nation's most significant World War II historic sites. A bronze plaque reflecting Hickam's historical significance was placed among other memorials surrounding the base flagpole.

15 September 1991 The **C-17A first flew** in a trip from Long Beach to Edwards AFB.

12 September – 18 October 1992 After **Typhoon Iniki** devastated Kauai in the Hawaiian chain, Air Mobility Command, Pacific Air Forces, the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard airlifted 6,888 tons of relief equipment and supplies to Hawaii. The operation also airlifted more than 12,000 passengers, including evacuees as well as military and civilian relief workers.

14-30 September 1995 The Air Force airlifted more than 30 tons of medical supplies from Charleston AFB, South Carolina, to Hanoi, Vietnam, marking the **first USAF humanitarian-airlift mission to Vietnam since 1975**.



15 September 1996 **Operation PACIFIC HAVEN** began. Saddam Hussein's attack on the Kurdish safe haven in northern Iraq drove thousands of Kurds from their homes. The Air Force evacuated thousands of these refugees to Andersen AFB, Guam, where they were processed for settlement in the United States. At left, three Kurds walk to the reception center at Andersen.